

Message Text

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SUBJ: BOURGUIBA COMMENTS ON MIDDLE EAST SITUATION:
RELATIONS WITH LIBYA

REF: TUNIS 1880

1. SUMMARY: IN TWO RECENT PRESS INTERVIEWS, PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HAS EXPRESSED HIS PESSIMISM ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST (IN CONTRAST TO VIEW OF FONMIN CHATTI REPORT-ED IN REFTEL)AND ATTRIBUTED THE RECENT FAILURE OF THE SECRETARY'S STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO SETTLEMENT TO ISRAEL'S INFLEXIBILITY. HE REITERATED HIS SUPPORT FOR THE UN'S 1947 PARTITION PLAN AS A BASIS FOR SETTLEMENT. BOURGUIBA ALSO COMMENTED ON MORIBUND PLANS FOR UNIFICATION WITH LIBYA. HE ASSERTED THAT A MAJORITY IN THE TUNISIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OPPOSES UNIFICATION AND WOULD NOT APPROVE INCLUSION OF REFERENCUM INTO CONSTITUTION. END SUMMARY.

2. MARCH 29 AND 30 FRENCH LANGUAGE PRESS CARRIED TEXTS OF INTERVIEWS GIVEN BY PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA TO ITALIAN AND DUTCH NEWSPAPERS IL TEMPO AND DE TELEGRAAF. BOURGUIBA PRESENTED HIS VIEWS ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS
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IN MIDDLE EAST, PARTICULARLY THE FAILURE OF SECRETARY

KISSINGER TO ACHIEVE A NEW SEPARATION OF FORCES IN THE SINAI. HE ATTRIBUTED THE FAILURE OF THE STEP BY STEP APPROACH, WHICH HE SAID WAS FOLLOWED BY THE SECRETARY IN ORDER TO AVOID CONFRONTING THE SOVIET UNION AGAIN AT GENEVA, TO ISRAEL'S BAD FAITH AND DETERMINATION NOT TO RETIRE FROM THE EGYPTIAN OIL-FIELDS AND THE STRATEGIC PASSES IN THE SINAI. BOURGUIBA REITERATED HIS OFT EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR THE UN 1947 PARTITION PLAN AS A BASIS FOR SETTLEMENT AND ADDED THAT PLO LEADER YASSIR ARAFAT AGREES WITH HIM, BUT CANNOT AFFORD TO SAY SO. NOTING THAT ARAFAT HAS PROBLEMS WITH THE PALESTINIAN "REJECTIONIST FRONT," BOURGUIBA SAID THAW IF ISRAEL WERE DISPOSED TO RECOGNIZE A PLAESTINIAN STATE THIS WOULD FACILITATE THINGS GREATLY. HE SAID THAT IT ALSO DOES NOT HELP THAT THE SECRETARY DOES NOT WANT TO RECOGNIZE THE PLO. BORUGUIBA DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS "QUITE PESSIMISTIC" OVER THE GENERAL SITUATION BUT HE DID NOT EXPECT WAR TO ERUPT IN THE NEAR FUTURE BECAUSE THE ARABS WANT TIME TO BUILD THEIR CONOMIES. BUT THERE WILL ALWAYS BE ANOTHER ROUND OF WARFARE AHEAD, HE SAID, SO LONG AS THE TERRITORIES OCCUPIED BY ISRAEL ARE NOT RECOVERED.

3. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ON THE POSSIBILITIES FOR UNIFICATION OF THE ARAB WORLD, BOURGUIBA OPINED THAT IT IS A DREAM THAT WILL NEVER BE REALIZED. IN THIS REGARD, HE SAID, "WE ARE IN DISAGREEMENT WITH PRESIDENT QADHAFI." FOR MYSELF, HE ASSERTED, I CANNOT ABANDON THE NAME OF TUNISIA FOR THAT OF THE ISLAMIC ARAB REPUBLIC. HE NOTED THE CONSTITUTIONAL STEPS WHICH MUST BE UNDERTAKEN TO PERMIT UNIFICATION OF THE TWO STATES (POINTING OUT THAT HE DID NOT KNOW IF THERE IS A LIBYAN CONSTITUTION) AND THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN CHANGING THE CONSTITUION TO PERMIT A REFERENDUM. BOURGUIBA SAID THAT A MAJORITY IN THE NAWIONAL ASSEMBLY DID NOT FAVOR THE JERBA UNIFICATION PLAN AND CONSEQUENTLY HE DID NOT THINK THE ASSEMBLY WOULD APPROVE A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT PERMITTING A REFERENDUM.

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4. COMMENT: BOURGUIBA'S PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF PESSIMISM APPEARS TO CONTRAST WITH CHATTI'S PROVATELY EXPRESSED OPTIMISM, REPORTED TUNIS 1880. REASONING BEHIND BOTH STATEMENTS, HOWEVER, IS SIMILAR, BOTH ATTRIBUTING BLAME FOR BREAKDOWN OF NEGOTIATIONS TO ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE; AND BOTH EMPHASIZING THAT THEY DO NOT EXPECT HOSTILITIES TO ERUP IN NEAR FUTURE BOURGUIBA WAS FOCUSING ON FAILURE OF ISRAEL AND US

SO FAR TO DEAL ADEQUATELY WITH PALESTINE PROBLEM,
WHILE CHATTI DWELT BY IMPLICATION ON PROSPECTS FOR
REVISED U.S. POLICY.

5. REGARDING RELATIONS WITH LIBYA, THERE HAS BEEN
NO EVIDENCE THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS EVER SENT A
REFERENDUM AMENDMENT TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR
CONSIDERATION. BOURBUIBA'S REMARKS MAY FORESHADOW A
GOT PLAN TO INTRODUCE SUCH AK AMENDMENT IF QADHAFI
INSISTS ON IT, BUT WITH ASSUMPTION THAT THE
ASSEMBLY WILL NOT APPROVE THE CHANGE. THIS WILL BE
SOMEWHAT AWKWARD, SINCE THE CAREFULLY MANAGED PARTY
CONGRESS OF SEPTEMBER 1974 CALLED FOR AMENDMENT TO
PERMIT A REFERENDUM.
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